

Chapter Three

Bridging the Gap between ‘War’ and ‘Peace’: The Case of Belgian Refugees in Britain

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August 2014 marked the beginning of a four-year long period of international commemorative activities to honour the centenary of the First World War. The magnified significance awarded to the conflict has brought with it a vigorous national appetite in Britain to locate examples of sacrifice, heroism, and the force of the human spirit. The experience of refugees from Belgium, given shelter in Britain from the earliest days of the conflict, has provided just such a ready-made narrative for a ‘useable past’ which has allowed British politicians to claim moral cache for the historical treatment of immigrants.¹ Similarly, within the retelling of that history, the British public have been encouraged to accept the hugely simplistic and yet comforting narrative of their nation as a bulwark of long-entrenched liberal values.²

In reality, whilst the estimated 250,000 so-called ‘Belgian refugees’ who found their way to Britain, largely between August 1914 and the end of 1915 (for exiles from other beleaguered continental nations who had arrived via Belgium also found themselves inaccurately characterised thus), were the recipients of an unprecedented outpouring of localised philanthropy, labour initiatives and an (initially) warm welcome, their treatment fell far from the model of amiable relations often claimed. This was none more so apparent than in the British government’s scheme for the repatriation of the refugees at the end of the war which descended into an exercise in hasty, even brutal efficiency to rid the country of any refugee who remained. By January 1920, of the possible 12,000 who had not returned to the continent under their own steam, or taken up the government’s offer of ‘free’ (that is, predicated on certain draconian conditions) passage to Belgium, those who lingered found themselves the object of increasingly stringent rhetoric which reframed them as a ‘problem’, and their ‘option’ of repatriation replaced by the prospect of forced deportation.³

Although the pace of scholarship about the experience of Belgian refugees in Britain has increased exponentially in recent years, going some way towards rescuing this episode of displacement and exile from oblivion, attention paid to the final stages of that experience has been sorely lacking.⁴ Besides the often cursory mention of the

repatriation scheme, typically used to provide a neat ending to accounts of the refugee movement, few histories have examined in detail the particulars of the government policy to extract Belgians from villages, towns and cities across the country.⁵ Neither has there been any sustained consideration of the conditions that the returned faced once they arrived back in their war-torn, economically devastated and socially traumatised homeland. Instead the scholarship has often sadly echoed the attitude of the British state towards the refugees; that is, once the refugees were ‘out of sight’ of Britain, they found themselves ‘out of mind’ too. Yet, as Colin Holmes pointed out in his seminal study of immigration to Britain from the Victorian period onwards, traces of the Belgians remained, often in very tangible forms, “in the shape of the National Projectile Factory at Birtley, the run-down Kryn and Lahy works at Letchworth [...], ‘the Belgian houses’ in Derby, the painting by Franzoni on the ‘Landing of the Belgian refugees August 1914’ . . . and [at the time of writing at least] the existence of women, now growing old in Belgium, whose name of Angele commemorate their birth in England”.⁶ Such legacies of the wartime refugee presence linger not only in Britain’s built environment but also in the local histories of communities who provided housing, jobs and charity to arriving Belgians. Their memories of this exceptional time did not cease with the ending of hostilities but often stayed with families and communities for many years. In a no doubt far larger number of cases than have been documented, for example, relations between the hosts and the hosted after 1918 frequently endured through regular postal correspondence and even mutual visits to one another’s homelands.⁷

This rather glaring neglect of the various facets of the refugees’ negotiation of the bridge between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ speaks perhaps of the more widespread tendency within the historiography to bracket First World War histories with the somewhat artificial chronological construction ‘1914 – 1918’. Whilst these years certainly mark the ‘official’ start and end point of the conflict, they make no allowances for either the long build-up to the outbreak of hostilities, nor the human ‘fall-out’ and long and often immensely difficult period of national reconstruction which many states faced in and beyond the inter-war years. So too, however, does this lacunae reflect the void which refugees often find themselves cast into when what should be ‘their’ history comes to be written. Even in the retelling of the trans-national histories of international conflict, refugees have and continue to ‘fall into the cracks’ of history, typically falling outside of national histories whilst also sitting

uncomfortably with the cross-national tendency (in First World War studies at least) to prioritise front line action over home front experience; bloody sacrifice and heroism over civilian displacement.⁸ As Peter Gatrell has pointed out in his history of refugees from the Russian Empire during the First World War, “soldiers had a chance to become heroes; but no refugee was lionized. Even in death, military and civilian casualties were accorded different treatment. There are no war graves for the thousands of refugees who died en route to a ‘place of safety’ ”.⁹

This chapter will seek to correct this oversight by arguing that these latter stages of the Belgian refugee experience offer more than simply a bookend to a four-year long period of international conflict. Indeed, a closer examination of the processes whereby those in exile found themselves returned to the continent reveals much about both the continued erosion of British Liberalism, as well as the anxieties of a nation emerging from a prolonged period of international uncertainty to face, once again, the challenges of domestic volatility, economic fragility and social unrest. So too, however, does attention paid to the early days and months of peacetime offer an opportunity to touch upon, albeit briefly, the ‘twilight zone’ which returning refugees, retreating armies, displaced civilians and others navigated; a strange temporal and spatial ‘no-man’s-land’ between the official ending of hostilities and the beginnings of national reconstruction schemes. Examining this much overlooked ‘twilight zone’ helps to expose the fallacy of the immediate aftermath of war as a time of ‘peace’. For refugees returning to Belgium, the point of arrival back ‘home’ marked, instead, the commencement of a long period of turmoil and transition, the traumas of which entered and still remain evident in Belgium’s own First World War memory culture.

From Repatriation to Deportation

The logistics of managing both small and large-scale repatriation schemes had long been on the wartime government’s agenda. From the earliest weeks and months of the conflict, the foreign office had grappled with the challenge of extracting British citizens from German-occupied zones of France and Belgium. As the curtain of war descended across northern Europe, hundreds of Britons found themselves trapped on the wrong side of the front line, stranded there in some cases after a short, but poorly timed sojourn to the continent. For others, Belgium or France had provided opportunities for work, for family life and for cultural enrichment – all sadly curtailed

in the summer of 1914 under the shroud of war. Yet securing the release of civilians was no easy feat and, even after two years of war, the foreign office remained extremely busy with the task of fielding communications from Britons increasingly desperate for news of their family members all but incarcerated behind enemy lines.¹⁰

The British government also found itself facing the inverse scenario: what to do with ‘enemy aliens’ living in Britain. At the outbreak of war, parliament wasted little time deciding upon the necessity of encouraging the departure or hastening the deportation of German and Austro-Hungarian citizens. The Aliens Restriction Act, a stringent modification of the Aliens Act of 1905, rapidly reconfigured under cover of war to restrict and exclude all “undesirable aliens”, passed into law after its first reading in the House of Commons on August 5, 1914.¹¹ Under the terms of the legislation, “undesirable” women, children and men who were unable to join up (the elderly and the invalided) as well as doctors and church ministers, were identified as prime targets for repatriation.¹² By May 1915, in the wake of the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the shift towards a far more uncompromising policy of interning male enemy aliens, those who were not at immediate threat of incarceration (women and men beyond military age) nonetheless had to justify why they should be allowed to remain.¹³ This state-led determination to ‘root out’ any possible threat to national security resulted, by the end of 1919, in the repatriation of almost 30,000 aliens.¹⁴

Belgians who lived out the war in Britain were also subject to a catalogue of policy manoeuvres by the British state that may have been different in tone but differed little in their overarching ambition. Indeed, whilst Belgians had been broadly welcomed to Britain as ‘friendly aliens’ at the outbreak of war, their plight and presence becoming a useful emblem of German tyranny, and a ready weapon for the fierce Germanophobic propaganda campaign waged in Britain, they too found themselves subject to the draconian measures enacted under the Aliens Restriction Act. This determined where refugees were allowed to settle as well as where they might visit, excluding them from port towns, seaside resorts and coastal locations more broadly.¹⁵ Moreover, whilst the refugee population was spared the threat of internment and, during the war years at least, forced deportation, it was always the intention of the British government that the refugees should be returned *en masse* to Belgium after the war. Herbert Samuel, President of the Local Government Board (LGB), the parliamentary body charged with supervising the relief of the incoming Belgians, had been careful to temper expectations about the duration of the Belgians’

stay in Britain from the outset. In a speech to the House of Commons in September 1914, Samuel took great care to caveat his confidence that ‘many individuals throughout the country will be ready to join in offering asylum here’ with the assurance that such hospitality would only be expected “until conditions in Belgium enable the refugees to return”.¹⁶ State hospitality towards “Brave little Belgium” appeared, then, when seen in this light, as little more than a useful tool to nurture the impression of a continued commitment to liberalism, tolerance and the right of asylum. So too was it a useful weapon of propaganda in the fight against the “evil hun”. Yet, hospitality was, in reality, bestowed on a temporary basis only. Repatriation, rather than naturalisation was, from the inception of the relief scheme, the ultimate goal.

This commitment to repatriation was in evidence at both a local, national and even international level from the early stages of the war, even when its foresighted aspirations was seen to be at odds with the more immediate need to provide relief.¹⁷ The Belgian Repatriation Fund, established by the English wife of the Belgian Secretary of State, had been set up to anticipate the needs of Belgian people who chose to return to liberated zones in advance of state-funded repatriation initiatives. Its early establishment was an indicator of the assumption – pervasive even into 1915 – that the war would be short.¹⁸ Madam Vandervelte, the mastermind behind the fund, disseminated appeals across Britain and its Empire, beseeching the Empire’s citizens to give generously.¹⁹ Local communities in Britain also found themselves the objects of this charity drive to secure donations to the fund. Posters disseminated across the country placed the onus on “English men and women” to “remember August, 1914”; a sentiment accompanied by a cartoon from *Punch* showing a belligerent Germany confronted by a diminutive and yet determined Belgium blocking their passage. This lobbying for funding positioned Britons as owing a ‘moral debt’ to Belgium for its early sacrifices. The Repatriation Fund – distinct from the objectives of the later Repatriation Committee – also looked to shift the onus onto the British people, reminding them that “The Governments of England and Belgium are doing much, but they cannot do everything. Individual cases of hardship must be met by individual generosity. Do not allow Government to pay all your debts”.²⁰

However, from August 1916 the government took over the mantle of co-ordinating and driving forward the arrangements for the inevitable task of repatriation. Planning began even whilst war still raged and any prospect of returning the refugees

to their besieged homeland was unrealistic at best. The LGB nonetheless pushed on with the task of appointing a committee to examine the question of how the repatriation of the Belgian exiles should be managed. The aptly named Repatriation Committee, headed up by Basil Peto, Conservative MP for Devizes, took a full year to investigate the matter, reporting in July 1917. From the earliest pages of the committee's interim report it became evident that finding a method of repatriating whilst hostilities continued was not as remote a possibility as was at first assumed. However, the decision, the committee concluded, "must be governed in the first instance by the views of the General Headquarters Staffs of the Allied Forces in the West". Of secondary consideration were the conditions in Belgium itself. These would come into play only if and when the war had come to an end. In those circumstances, the committee magnanimously agreed, "the economic and industrial conditions prevailing in Belgium will be the deciding factor upon which the arrangements for the return of refugees will depend". Indeed, the committee acknowledged, feeding, housing and finding employment for the returning refugees were "all so intimately connected" with the broader challenges of national reconstruction in Belgium that any repatriation scheme had to be considered in relation to these issues.²¹

Whilst a large number of refugees had taken it upon themselves to return to Belgium or neighbouring states during the course of the First World War, a sizable number still remained by the war's conclusion. The central register of refugees, collated in early August 1919, calculated that 12,408 Belgians still resided in various districts across England, Scotland and Wales. However, the majority had come to congregate in the capital either for the purposes of work, to be closer to the cultural core of the Belgian expatriate community or, as became increasingly the case as the war reached its zenith, to be the first in line when the provisions for repatriation to Belgium had been put in place.²² This was a point of concern for the committee, not least because few options for housing a large influx of refugees in the capital existed. Whilst the refugee camps set up in Earls Court and Alexandra Palace to deal with the inward flow of migrants could accommodate approximately 4,000 and 3,000 respectively, few other large sites across London were equipped to accept a large, transient and unemployed community of aliens.

However, this was more than a logistical problem, as the committee acknowledged. The "danger of friction" arising between the refugees and "our own

people” as wartime labour opportunities dried up and many Belgians of working age were forced out of work loomed large as a potential flashpoint for antagonism between the hosts and the hosted.²³ Certainly, some isolated cases of visible discontent had arisen in the course of the war, usually predicated on localised frustrations about the perceived ‘privileges’ that the Belgians were enjoying at the expense of the local population. This was the case in Fulham, West London where refugees were accused of the dual crimes of occupying in-demand housing stock as well as being in receipt of more favourable relief packages than that received by the families of British soldiers.²⁴ Yet violent manifestations of such tensions were largely limited to locations of concentrated Belgian presence. At the munitions works at Birtley in Tyneside, employer of 6,000 Belgians (overwhelmingly conscripted soldiers), it was the Belgians themselves who in December 1916 turned to violent means to express their discontent with the conditions that they were subject to.²⁵

Such episodes were rare; more typical was a general apathy towards the ‘plight’ of the Belgians as the war dragged on, manifesting, on occasion, into an outspoken disgruntlement that the Belgian community appeared to enjoy the ‘benefits’ of philanthropy, hospitality and goodwill, whilst avoiding the ‘hardships’ of wartime shortages and conscription.²⁶ This disgruntlement was compounded still further as the war dragged on and pressures on local communities to give up their men to conscription increased. Belgian refugees, more difficult to conscript because of their dispersion across Britain and other allied nations, found themselves labelled as “shirkers”.²⁷

However, the drive to repatriate the Belgians did not emanate solely from the British hosts. The Belgian government was also keen to encourage the return of their exiled citizens.²⁸ Yet organisation on this front, at least during the war itself, was fragmentary. Instead, a ‘home-grown’ drive to bring the refugees home more typically emanated from locally concentrated bodies such as religious congregations. Their efforts however were, and could only ever, be advisory, using the force of rhetorical persuasion and patriotic sentiment to keep the notion of ‘return’ ever present in the refugees’ mind-set. The tone of sermons delivered by Father Callewaert, priest to refugees in Stockport and surrounding districts, typified such efforts. As one Belgian congregant recalled in the refugee’s magazine *Echo de Belgique* in August 1916, Father Callewaert had spoken “so movingly” to the group of refugees there gathered of their future return that “our hearts beat with heartfelt enthusiasm as we imagined

how the church bells of Mechelen, Bruges and Antwerp would once again ring out with our song of redemption”.²⁹ Hence, whilst few or possibly no grass-roots organisation to manage the logistics of repatriation emerged from within the refugee community itself, the decision taken by many individuals and families to return to Belgium or one of the neighbouring countries, even whilst war continued, suggests the success of such rhetoric.³⁰ Indeed, the steady flow of Belgians back to the continent from 1915 onwards did much to confirm the hopes of the delegation of Belgian officials posted to Britain to oversee the welfare of the Belgian community resident there that, for those who had not opted to self-repatriate by the war’s conclusion, rapid return as soon as circumstances allowed would be their primary objective. As Count Goblet d’Alviella, Vice-President of the Belgian senate, confidently asserted, “It goes without saying that the refugees, although proclaiming their indebtedness to the English nation, anxiously await the end of their exile”.³¹

In light of the Belgian state’s eagerness to guarantee the future loyalty of their citizens, the Repatriation Committee acknowledged the need to give the Belgian government some degree of regulatory power over the process of repatriation when the time came. From the outset, the committee agreed that “every person who desires to return, except at his own expense, must apply to the Belgian Repatriation Office, and that in no case will any facilities be given by the British Authorities until an individual authorisation has been sent from Belgium”.³² This appeared to bestow a degree of control upon the Belgian authorities to manage the flow of returning migrants. In reality, however, the Repatriation Committee harboured its own ambitions as to which ‘type’ of refugee they felt should be preferenced. These were, in the main, unemployed Belgians, prioritised for return to subvert the possibility of antagonism arising between Britons and Belgians.³³ The rapidity with which the 6,000 Belgians employed at the Birtley munitions work found themselves shipped back to Belgium at the close of the war is a telling manifestation of the British government’s nervousness on this point. The Ministry of Munitions, charged with the task of overseeing the Birtley community, grappled with the question of what to do with the Belgians employed there as the prospect of peace seemed ever more likely. It became, for Maurice S. Gibb, Representative of the Ministry of Munitions, by far the most “pressing question” concerning the factory’s future. However, options for “managing” the refugee population under peacetime conditions seemed limited. Whilst the sudden mass unemployment of the Belgian munitions workers was the most likely outcome

of the transition from war to peace, this outcome was to be avoided if at all possible. Indeed, so desperate was Whitehall to avoid this scenario that Gibb declared it “better to waste steel” by continuing to employ Belgians to manufacture shells rather than “allow[ing] the Belgians to do nothing, and so get into mischief, and possibly, on account of the amount of time on their hands, commence quarrelling with the neighbouring miners and others”.³⁴

This very scenario remained a core concern of the committee who, as the weeks passed by, insisted that, under no circumstances should Belgian munitions workers be allowed to remain at Birtley “in idleness”.³⁵ Whilst the logistical arrangements for transporting the sizable Birtley community to Hull and from there on to Antwerp were not straight forward, this did little to deter the government from prioritising their departure above all other communities and regions. By February 1919, virtually all of the 6,000 Belgians previously housed in the refugee village of Elisabethville and employed at Birtley had returned to Belgium. By June 1919, after a nine day auction, all of their furniture and household items that they were unable to fit within their meagre 300 pounds allowance, had been sold off.³⁶ In less than 8 months after the end of hostilities, few obvious signs of the Birtley Belgians remained. Whilst the buildings which had housed them still stood, at least until the 1930s, the site itself was put to different use after the Belgians’ departure, helping to erode still further the memory of their presence.

Whilst the Ministry of Munitions had managed the mass repatriation of the Birtley Belgians with ruthless efficiency, the Repatriation Committee had less success orchestrating the return of Belgians dispersed elsewhere in the country. Notices warning of an impending repatriation scheme had been placed in the local and national press, as well as being distributed to the refugees directly, in Flemish, French and English by way of the LGB and the Belgian Legation.³⁷ However, the War Relief Committee (WRC) – the conglomerate of philanthropic and charitable bodies who had facilitated aid for the Belgians from the earliest months of the war - increasingly found itself excluded from the discussions surrounding repatriation. By the final days of 1918, the WRC was forced to relinquish all responsibility for the refugees’ welfare and return, disbanding by the close of the year.

This rapid dismantlement of the WRC and the complete transference of power to the LGB severely hindered the establish lines of communication between the British authorities and the refugee community, as well as removing individuals ‘on

the ground' who, ordinarily, could have helped to orchestrate the process of repatriation.³⁸ In the event, the police service was called upon to help with the registration of all remaining refugees; a vast undertaking which required the distribution and subsequent collection of a form to be completed by all refugees "as a preliminary to their return".³⁹ Reaching refugees who remained in the provinces proved the most challenging task for such police forces. Despite the best efforts of the various regional police forces, by February 1919 the LGB had begun to express serious misgivings about the administration of the scheme noting that, of the roughly 14,000 refugees who still remained in Britain, only about half had returned the required form which would trigger their repatriation. The remainder, the LGB concluded, have "either not received the forms, or else having received them are lying low and making no sign".⁴⁰

Matters were to take a decidedly more serious turn as another government department took note of the refugees' reticence to make themselves known to the authorities. Just a week later, the failing scheme found itself the central topic of discussion at the Aliens and Nationality Committee, chaired by the Principle Assistant Secretary at the Home Office, Sir John Pedder. Pedder and his committee colleagues displayed little of the ambiguity about the process of repatriation articulated by the Repatriation Committee. Now considered a Home Office matter, Belgian refugees found themselves the object of both a far more stringent tone and far more stringent state policy. Talk no longer rotated around how the remaining Belgians in the country could be persuaded to return but instead prioritised the much more direct approach of serving notices upon any refugee who could be located, requiring them to explain why they had not yet taken up the offer of funded repatriation. Deportation, although a 'last resort', nonetheless remained on the table. To enact the agreed upon measure, police forces up and down the country were once again called upon to serve the refugees with notices and "warnings" to take advantage of the provisions in place for their repatriation "at their earliest opportunity".⁴¹

The looming prospect of the expiration of available shipping to transport the refugees back to the continent partly explained the sudden change of tact towards the refugees. The Ministry of Shipping could only guarantee ships until the end of March.⁴² On that basis the LGB declared themselves particularly anxious to "get rid of as many as possible" before that date.⁴³ To hasten the Belgians' departure, the LGB decreed that threats, such as the withdrawal of free passage and any other assistance

from the British government, should be now be deployed indiscriminately. Only those who had good reason not to avail themselves of the government scheme – the sick and wounded – would be spared the nationwide crackdown. What followed was the imposition of a final three-day deadline for refugees to complete their application form to expedite their return. Failure to do so meant the forfeiting of any further opportunity for assistance; financial or otherwise.⁴⁴

By the early autumn of 1919 the British government had all but washed their hands of the any refugees who still remained in the country, withdrawing all financial assistance and drawing the repatriation scheme to a close. In the aftermath of war, priorities and resources had shifted to more pressing domestic matters; a change of tact welcomed by the British public.⁴⁵ In mid-October the Home Office wrote to the Chief Constable of the Police to inform him that any remaining formal avenues of repatriation were now being managed entirely by the Belgian Government although this too would be withdrawn at the end of November.⁴⁶ The Belgian Government, now solely in charge of extracting any Belgians who remained in Britain, turned to a heady mix of patriotic sentiment, emotive persuasion and guilt-ridden reproaches, issuing notices in English, Flemish and French beseeching all remaining refugees to return to Belgium to assist with the enormous task of “national reconstruction”.⁴⁷ The time had come for moving on and moving forward, especially as the hospitality of the British could no longer be relied upon.

Entering the ‘Twilight Zone’

For those Belgians who did avail themselves of the opportunity to return to their homeland, either during the war years, or immediately after its conclusion, via the British government’s repatriation scheme or by other means, the country that they arrived in was a place often starkly and terribly different from the one they had left behind in 1914. Four years of warfare and occupation had left gaping physical scars on the Belgian landscape, cut through by trenches, weapons dug-outs and corpse-strewn battlefields. Many villages, towns and cities across the country had suffered under repeated bombardment, military action, occupation and looting, some affected on a massive scale, with physical devastation most evident in the northern provinces of West and East Flanders. Although the ruination was not as extreme as in parts of northern France, the war and its aftermath had nonetheless left a severely depleted nation and people in its wake. During the German occupation and eventual

withdrawal, Belgian industrial sites and infrastructure had been a particular target for partial or complete sabotage or demolition, often as a means to cripple Belgian efforts to oppose the occupation, as punishment for non-cooperation, or, as appeared to be the objective of the departing German army, to hinder Belgium's economic recovery in peacetime.⁴⁸

However, arguably the most significant impact of warfare as four years of conflict, death and destruction inched painstakingly slowly to a negotiated ceasefire was the protracted and deep-rooted effects felt by the people of the newly liberated nation. In Belgium, even the inevitability of the German surrender by the early autumn of 1918 brought little stability for the population of villages and towns directly in the path of the retreating armies. As the *Liverpool Daily Post* reported towards the end of October, as the war entered its final throws "processions" of men, women and children from Belgium and France as well as detachments of German soldiers had begun to flee over the border into Dutch territory away from the remnants of the conflict zones, "their condition every bit as bad" as that of the medley of human traffic which had criss-crossed the continent at the beginning of the war. Even Belgium's major urban centres could not escape the turmoil of the war's final days. Whilst the newspaper reported that Antwerp was "quiet", Brussels experienced "hours of the tensest emotions and excitement" as "nearer and nearer" came "the sound of the guns heralding delivery". German civilians who had spent the war in the city now began to depart *en masse* and German soldiers left their posts, both to be replaced by a reported one hundred and fifty thousand refugees who had poured into the city from surrounding regions. Hence, in the maelstrom of the war's conclusion, as war receded but peace was not yet within grasp, the line between soldiers, civilians and refugees, conflict zones and civilian zones became ever more blurred.⁴⁹

As 'peacetime' arrived after the November 11 armistice, only slowly did the true human and material cost of war and occupation begin to dawn. The *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* typified the impassioned (and yet often poorly informed) stance adopted by many whose demands for recompense for Belgians depended upon sensationalist details about the manner of the peoples' suffering. Under occupation, the *Gazette's* special correspondent claimed, Belgians had been "reduced to eating mangold wurzels, turnips, and beetroots, robbing the cattle to keep themselves alive".⁵⁰ Other British newspapers adopted a more restrained stance to Belgian anguish, juxtaposing the bittersweet sorrows caused by four long years of war against

the unbridled elation that war was finally over. One regional British newspaper, for example, tempered their account of the scenes of joy in Mons, in the west of Belgium, with the evident misery felt by the town's people for the "gallant comrades who had fallen". As the national anthem was sung and crowds lined the streets to cheer, "bronzed and hardened soldiers" stood erect, many unable to sing for the tears pouring down their faces. This paradox of joy and sorrow found a strange echo in the town's architecture where "faces peer[ed] forth from the shattered windows and twisted iron balconies" to throw flowers and wave flags. Into this scene entered "a pathetic stream of returning refugees, with their bedding and household goods on small borrows"; symbols of the many thousands of refugees who returned to Belgium from Britain, the Netherlands and other surrounding neutral and allied nations as war drew to a close.⁵¹

Mons was hence just one of hundreds of towns and cities to witness a near continuous returning flow of refugees in the early weeks and months of peacetime. As one British correspondent rather poetically suggested, by the winter of 1918 Belgium and France were awash with weary "pilgrims" travelling by any and every means to reach their long abandoned home. Cecil Roberts, author of the "pilgrim" moniker and Special Correspondent for the *Liverpool Echo*, submitted a moving account of just such a spectacle as he and a travelling companion attempted the long overland journey between Cologne and Lille by way of Germany, Belgium and France's creaking rail networks. The final leg of their journey, when train travel became impossible, was undertaken by lorry; their travelling companions a motley assortment of soldiers and released prisoners (of various nationalities) and returning Belgian refugees. Whilst in transit, Roberts reported that one elderly lady recounted her tale of finding herself trapped near Brussels in 1914 unable to return to her home in Tournai. It was with trepidation that she now returned, uncertain if her husband would still be alive and her house still standing "for she had received no word during all that time". Nonetheless, Roberts insisted, the storyteller was a "cheerful old lady" who "joined in" with the singing of the other inhabitants of the lorry, remaining stoical and uncomplaining in the face of such adversity.⁵²

This valorisation of Belgians as noble victims of a belligerent aggressor – a distinct echo of the propagandist rhetoric crafted in Britain about 'gallant little Belgium' in the early months of the war – goes against the reading offered by various scholars which suggests that, by the war's conclusion, Belgians had begun to lose

their heroic status.⁵³ Yet, that image clearly continued to exist in certain circles at least; in this instance to provide an appealing media narrative of forbearance and hope.⁵⁴ So too did the persistence of such rhetoric help to shore up the government's insistence that the war had both necessary and morally justifiable. This was a particularly crucial message to convey as the true human and material cost of four years of conflict became a source of consternation and despair for many Britons once the euphoria of early November was over.⁵⁵ Moreover, the unremitting demonisation of Germany also helped to firm up the resolve of the nation to impose severe penalties upon the now-chastened country as negotiations began over the terms of the peace treaty. A report by Francis Hyde Villiers, Minister to Belgium, at the end of December 1918 to former Prime Minister Arthur Balfour, now Foreign Secretary, about the condition of Brussels after the evacuation of the Germans, demonstrated the government's commitment to this type of rhetoric: Villiers insisted that the "hardship" suffered by "almost every class" of Brusselois society was a direct consequence of the "odious character" of the occupying forces. As Villiers explained, "The arrogance of the Germans, restrictions, house-to-house raids, requisitions, fines, trials and condemnations, the uncertainty as to what each day might not bring forth produced a strain which was hard to bear". Nonetheless, Villiers concluded, "with but few exceptions, the attitude of the [Belgian] people remained admirable".⁵⁶

In Britain at a local level too there appeared to be an appetite for persisting with the presentation of Belgian refugees as pathetic and aggrieved. A letter from Jean Meunes, a recently returned Belgian refugee, to Mr W. Cuthbert of Carlton Place, Glasgow, demonstrating this trend found its way into the *Scotsman* in early January 1919 (presumably because Mr Cuthbert felt there would be a ready audience for Meunes' "pathetic letter"). "It was a very poor view when we arrived" back in Hoboken, Antwerp, the letter began. "All the cranes for loading and unloading the goods of the steamers were stolen and sent to Germany . . . the grass was growing between the pavements like a meadow, that were [sic] our first impression when we arrived, and a very poor one". Meunes went on to give an account of the severe food shortages, the "exhausted", "pale and grey faces" of the people of Antwerp, only "covered in rags", the city's industry laying "idle" because the machinery has been looted or destroyed, and the lack of jobs for the city's inhabitants.⁵⁷

Whilst the letter served as a pertinent reinforcement of the image of a courageous yet broken Belgium, it also operates as an important reminder that, whilst

the war may have come to an end this did not automatically signal the end of relations between Britons and Belgians. Instead, some Britons, especially those who had directly hosted refugee families, remained concerned for the welfare of 'their' Belgians long after their return. Moreover, the frequent local press reports into conditions in Belgium into the early 1920s seemed to address a demand for 'follow up' which the haste of the government's repatriation scheme had abruptly curtailed, on a formal level at least. None more so was this apparent than in the visit of the former Mayor and Mayoress of Preston and the city's Town Clerk to devastated regions of Northern France and Belgium in the spring of 1920. At the wartime Mayor's behest, a fund to help relieve the suffering of the people of Le Bassee on the French-Belgian border, had been launched in Preston "some time ago". The Preston delegation's visit thus served the important purpose of seeing how those funds would be spent, as well as offering the opportunity to report back on conditions in the border region to the curious and concerned people of Preston. The visit was, according to the *Lancashire Daily Post*, characterised by moments of delighted encounter between the British visitors and Belgians formerly resident of Preston who "impressed upon the visitors time after time their everlasting gratitude to Preston people". Such open displays of indebtedness was sufficient to "satisfy" the former Mayor that "what we are doing [in providing financial assistance] is right".⁵⁸

However, relations between Britons and Belgians were not always as affectionate as the example of Preston suggests. Certainly not all former hosts seemed willing to reflect upon their interactions with their Belgian guests as an unconditionally positive experience. Indeed, it was frequently the moment at which the long-awaited departure of the Belgians occurred which seemed to bring forth such reservations, as a report in the *Sheffield Independent* implied. Whilst the local "colony" of refugees were declared to have been "good", this judgement was made almost entirely based upon the refugees' willingness "to assimilate and learn English" as well as their efforts to support themselves through finding suitable employment. There was little space in such relations for unadulterated sympathy for the Belgians as refugees and exiles facing many years of personal and national reconstruction in a country devastated by war.⁵⁹

Other isolated cases suggests that the impending moment of departure brought its own traumas for refugees who knew they would soon be repatriated. For some, this no doubt manifested itself in the unpleasant and unsettling task of selling off furniture

and personal possessions accumulated in the course of the war.⁶⁰ For others, the rupture occasioned by the prospect of return migration found a more dramatic outlet. In December 1919, for example, Jeanne de Lattin, a refugee resident in Blackpool, took her own life “rather than return to her husband in Belgium”.⁶¹ Indeed, even if the challenges and trauma of departure from the security and sanctuary offered by Britain were overcome, then many former refugees still found that they had to surmount the trials of reintegration in Belgium and acceptance by their fellow Belgian citizens. In the early weeks and months after return, as well as the logistical and practical hurdles of trans-national travel, finding employment and locating food and clothing, returning refugees also had to face the stigma frequently foisted upon them by their fellow countrymen. As one account given in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* from a former refugee now returned to Belgium implied, those who had endured the German occupation resented those sectors of the population who had lived out the war in Britain, convinced that they had enjoyed the “double advantage” of “making money and living free of rent and rates, with food and clothing provided”.⁶²

However, this source of tension between Belgian and Belgian was far more complex than the newspaper appeared to realise; so emotionally deep-rooted and divergent were the wartime experiences of the “homestayers” and “those of the Yser”. Henry de Man, a prominent Belgian socialist who enjoyed a spell as a lecturer in Sociology at the University of Washington after the war, attempted to articulate the extent of this fissure for a North American audience in an article for *The North American Review* in May 1920. In his wide-ranging article, Man, in a clear departure from the account offered in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, saw little advantage for those who had spent their war away from Belgium, whether serving on the front line or in self-exile in Britain or France. For Man, all such exiles had occupied the front line, either literally or figuratively, and thus the “shock of disappointment” upon return, of “finding that nothing had changed” despite their experiences in the “fermenting world” beyond their homeland served only to drive a wedge between themselves and those who had remained behind.⁶³

With the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Belgium’s fragile post-war social infrastructure came under even further strain. The disappointment of few territorial gains and a sense of betrayal at the comparatively meagre reparations awarded to Belgium compared to that negotiated for the other Allied nations engendered bitterness and resentment towards foreign neighbours, especially those who had

appeared, through four long years of conflict, to be Belgium's friend and protector.⁶⁴ As Henri Jaspar, Belgium's Foreign Minister, complained in a speech to the British Institute of International Affairs in May 1924, the retraction of guarantees to enshrine the "inviolability" of Belgian territory, a principle that Jaspar regarded as fundamental to her establishment in 1830, signified the "gravest" and "one of the most incomprehensible omissions" of the treaty. So too was the diminishing prospect of financial support, either by way of reparations or from international aid to help Belgium with the considerable task of national reconstruction, a source of considerable consternation. Whilst Jaspar insisted that such developments were "but an episode in our history" – a "serious but temporary" one – that in time would be overcome, relations between Belgium and Britain had noticeably soured by the mid-1920s. Even the "admirable and disinterested" help offered by Britain to "unhappy Belgium in the most tragic hours of her life" at the outbreak of war seemed poor compensation for the more immediate and critical material needs of a nation suffering under the prolonged traumas of the destructive legacies of war.⁶⁵

For Jaspar, the thousands of Belgian refugees who had been hosted by Britons during the First World War featured as little but an afterthought in his lengthy invective, despite the "everlasting memories" he assumed they held of their experiences in "British homes". Far more serious were the physical scars left upon the nation's landscape, the 'systematic destruction' of many of her industrial sites and residential areas, and the deportation and massacre of her civilians. The ordeal of exile and displacement endured by Belgians who had chosen or been forced to flee made little discernible impression upon Jaspar's tangled and complex sense of national loss and suffering.⁶⁶

This marginalisation of the refugee experience was to become a staple of both Belgium's post-war reconstruction programme and of the nation's culture of memory and remembrance about the conflict. The establishment of a national compensation scheme for "war victims" which included within its provisions "civilian invalids" made no allowances for the psychological injuries caused by the traumas of flight, exile and refugeedom.⁶⁷ Neither has there been any formal acknowledgement of the refugee experience within Belgium's centenary commemorations, although one of the Belgian government's stated core commemorative themes is "collective remembrance".⁶⁸ Sophie de Schaepdrijver has suggested that this absence of a concretised "locus of tragedy" in Belgium in the post-war period, of which the

exclusion of the refugee experience is one particularly glaring omission, can be partly explained by Belgium's loss of status as "heroic" and "gallant" as the war dragged to its bloody conclusion. According to Schaepdrijver, once the "body count" came to "overshadow" the founding myths of the war – Germany as belligerent aggressor being the most fundamental of these – the "culture of war" itself was rapidly dismantled and with it the image of Belgium as the antithesis to German belligerence. The final death knell to Belgium's wartime image was signalled by the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, by which point "'Belgium', once shorthand for the moral issues of the war, had become a by-word for propaganda". For Belgian society, already fractured internally along linguistic, religious, and cultural fault lines, this stark shift in her externally projected and accepted identity exacerbated these fissures. Divergent wartime experiences as well as further social splintering in the post-war years as Flemish nationalism came increasingly to the fore, made the possibility of coming together as a "community of fate" – of which the former refugees might be a part – ever more remote in the decades since the war's conclusion.⁶⁹ The internal ruptures of the Belgian nation hence mimicked the 'refugee experience' itself: far from singular and uniform, and an improbable candidate (as a collective episode of trauma) through which to unify the nation.

As Anton van den Braumbussche has intoned, "The many centrifugal forces within the Belgian nation have undeniably prevented Belgium from coming to terms with a sometimes difficult, compromising, and unbearable past". This blinkered view, according to van den Braumbussche, has extended to the skirting of necessary national debates on not least Belgium's "historical responsibilities" but also its "traumatic experiences".⁷⁰ In Belgium, the refugee experience of a possible two million of its citizens, caught up within this broader culture of avoidance, has thus enjoyed little of the elevated treatment that has been bestowed upon it in Britain.⁷¹ This is in part, perhaps, because of the lingering stigma attached to the status of being a refugee, even in a global society increasingly conversant with the plight of refugees. So too, however, does it speak of a very particular culture of remembrance of the First World War (so often replicated for other episodes of conflict) which valorises combatant contributions and civilian sacrifice but has not yet extended its sympathies to those who were forced to flee the zones of conflict.

In Britain, however, there has been far less reticence to make ‘use’ of her historic role as a ‘protector’ and ‘saviour’ of ‘needy’ refugees from Belgium. Doing so has helped to uphold Britain’s vaulted image as a beacon of tolerance; however inaccurate the record of her treatment of aliens and newcomers across and beyond the twentieth century has shown this image to be. However, in the case of the episode of Belgian presence in Britain, the perpetuation of this image has come at the expense (or the advantage, depending upon your perspective) of side-lining the realities of the final stages of war for the refugee community. The process of repatriation and return was disruptive at best and deeply distressing and enduringly traumatic at worst for many refugees; an experience helped little by the rather mercenary manner in which it was managed by the British government. The haste with which the state-funded repatriation scheme was enacted was promoted as the ‘generous’ final act of a benevolent Britain but operated, first and foremost, to serve Britain’s own interests. Removing refugees as swiftly as possible served to neutralise possible sources of localised tension between the hosts and the hosted, address domestic anxieties about Britain’s own task of recovery and reconstruction, and reaffirm the government’s promise that the incomers would be but a temporary presence only.

The continued concern of individuals, families and local relief organisations for the fate of returning Belgians was a far cry from the political use made of the repatriation process by the British state. Many communities were, instead, in the main motivated by a genuine humanitarian instinct to inquire about the welfare of ‘their’ Belgians long after the war’s conclusion, although they too were not immune to the moral elevation that exuberant displays of gratitude by their former guests bestowed upon them. Indeed, these differing responses to the conclusion of the refugee episode demonstrates how divergent and distinctly regarded was the experience of playing host in ‘real’ terms (that is, for local people as against the ‘remote’ hospitality offered by the British state). The ‘end’ of the war marked only a new stage in relations as former refugees left behind the traumas of exile for the challenges of return, reconstruction and recovery.

¹ See, for example, William Hague, ‘Humanising hell: our restless conscience and the search for peace’, October 23, 2014, Prime Minister’s Office, accessed August 28, 2016,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/humanising-hell-our-restless-conscience-and-the-search-for-peace-2014-one-people-oration>

² See, for example, the article by Evan Bartlett, “The Origin of the Biggest Flow of Refugees Britain’s History May Surprise You,” *Independent*, September 6, 2015, which linked David Cameron’s change of stance towards Syrian refugees to Britain’s “long and celebrated history of welcoming those fleeing war and persecution”. Accessed August 28, 2016, http://indy100.independent.co.uk/article/the-origin-of-the-biggest-flow-of-refugees-in-britains-history-may-surprise-you--bydS_L0oSe

³ The figure of 12,000 is based upon the number of refugees on the Central Register, according to Police Districts, August 7, 1919, The National Archives, Kew (TNA), HO 45/10882/344019. Although the Aliens and Nationality Committee, which met in late February 1919, agreed that deportation should be a last resort, they nonetheless debated how to “exercise compulsion” and apply “pressure” to force refugees to accept the British government’s timeframe for repatriation. See Aliens and Nationality Committee minutes of proceedings of second meeting, February 28, 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/ 344019.

⁴ The recent special issue of *Immigrants and Minorities* devoted to Belgian refugees is a case in point: whilst the regional experience of the refugees is given much needed attention, none of the seven article address the process of repatriation in a sustained way. See *Immigrants and Minorities*, 34:2 (2016).

⁵ Although Tony Kushner briefly raised the issue in comments to a BBC article on Belgian Refugees. See Denise Winterman, “World War One: How 250,000 refugees didn’t leave a trace,” *BBC Magazine*, September 15, 2014, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-28857769>.

⁶ Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 91.

⁷ This is evident in the case of two families – the Hicksons of Barnton, Cheshire and their wartime neighbours the Melsens from Antwerp. The daughters of these two families kept in touch for several decades after the war. Twenty years of correspondence were passed to the author by a descendent of Annie Hickson.

⁸ Tony Kushner, “Local Heroes: Belgian refugees in Britain during the First World War,” *Immigrants and Minorities*, 18: 1, (1999), 1 – 2.

⁹ Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I*, paperback edn., (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁰ Foreign Office file on the reparation of British women and children detained in Belgium and Northern France, 1916 – 1918, TNA, FO 383/133.

¹¹ House of Commons Debate, 05 August, 1914, vol. 65, c. 2041.

¹² The Aliens Restriction Act, 1914

¹³ Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, 96.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Aliens Restriction Act, 1914.

¹⁶ Herbert Samuel, House of Commons (Hansard), vol. 66, col. 558, September 9, 1914.

¹⁷ Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1982), 466-7.

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- ¹⁸ Ibid., 478.
- ¹⁹ See, for example, “Belgian Repatriation: An Appeal to Australia,” *The Age*, June 12, 1915, 18.
- ²⁰ Belgian Repatriation Fund Poster, undated, Cheshire Records Office (CRO), ZRP 14/39.
- ²¹ Repatriation Committee Interim Report, July 4, 1917, TNA, HO45/10882/344019.
- ²² Refugees on Central Register by Police Districts, August 7, 1919, TNA, HO 45/10882/344019.
- ²³ Reparations Committee, Interim Report.
- ²⁴ Katherine Knox and Tony Kushner, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 57.
- ²⁵ Daniel Laqua, “Belgian exiles, the British and the Great War: the Birtley Belgians of Elisabethville,” *Immigrants and Minorities*, 34:2 (2016): 117-8. Reference to these riots and as well as anxiety that they might be repeated were made as decisions were taken by the Ministry of Munitions about demobilisation, TNA, July and August 1918, MUN 5/78/327/4.
- ²⁶ See, for example, “Our Belgian Guests,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 3, 1916, 7.
- ²⁷ Sophie de Schaepdrijver, “Death is Everywhere: The Shifting Locus of Tragedy in Belgian Great War Literature,” *Yale French Studies*, 102 (2002): 108-9.
- ²⁸ This became particularly apparent at the war’s conclusion. See, for example, E. A Bouchout, “To the Belgian Refugees,” September 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/344019.
- ²⁹ Louise Perée, *Echo de Belgique*, August 4, 1916, 8. I am grateful to Andrew and Stella Pleass for providing this translation from the original.
- ³⁰ The departure of large numbers of Belgians was raised in parliamentary questions. See House of Commons Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), vol. LXXIV, col. 725, September 28, 1915.
- ³¹ Ministry of Health, Report on the Work undertaken by the British Government in the Reception and Care of the Belgian Refugees, 1920, accessed August 18, 2016.
http://digital.slv.vic.gov.au/view/action/singleViewer.do?dvs=1471529721835~423&locale=en_GB&metadata_object_ratio=10&show_metadata=true&VIEWER_URL=/view/action/singleViewer.do?&preferred_usage_type=VIEW_MAIN&DELIVERY_RULE_ID=10&frameId=1&usePid1=true&usePid2=true.
- ³² Repatriation Committee, Interim Report.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Correspondence between Maurice S. Gibb to C. H Stevens, Ministry of Munitions, Whitehall, July 30, 1918, TNA, MUN 5/78/327/4.
- ³⁵ Council Committee summary report on Demobilisation and Reconstruction, August 29, 2018, TNA, MUN 5/78/327/4.
- ³⁶ Catalogue listing furnishing for Sale from Belgian township of Birtley, May 26 – 1919, TNA, MUN 5/78/327/11. See also Joseph Schlesinger and Douglas McMurtrie, *The Birtley Belgians* (Durham: North East Centre for Education about Europe, 1990), 31–2 for further details about the departure of the Belgians from Elisabethville.

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- ³⁷ See, for example, “Repatriation of Belgians,” *Times*, November 6, 1918, 3. “Repatriation of Belgians: A Warning to Refugees,” *The Scotsman*, November 6, 1918, 6; Draft notice “Belgian Refugees in Great Britain,” undated, TNA, HO45/10882/344019.
- ³⁸ Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 444-6.
- ³⁹ Correspondence from Moylon to the Chief Constables of West Riding, Lancashire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Cambridgeshire, Glamorganshire, Monmouthshire, and Cheshire, undated, TNA, HO45/10882/ 344019.
- ⁴⁰ Local Government Board minutes, February 20, 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/ 344019.
- ⁴¹ Aliens and Nationality Committee, minutes of proceedings at the second meeting, February 28, 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/ 344019.
- ⁴² Letter from Mr Legget to Mr Streatfield, February 20, 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/344019.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ Basil E. Peto (LGB), “Terugkeer der Belgische Vluchtelingen;” “Rapatriement des Réfugiés Belges,” March 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/344019.
- ⁴⁵ Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), 312-333.
- ⁴⁶ Letter from the Home Office to the Chief Constable, October 14, 1919, TNA, HO45/10882/344019.
- ⁴⁷ Bouchout, “To the Belgian Refugees”.
- ⁴⁸ Henry de Man, “Revolution or Evolution in Belgium?,” *The North American Review*, 211:774 (1920): 601-2 and Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004), 203-4; 215-9.
- ⁴⁹ “Stream of Refugees from Belgium: Scenes on Dutch Border,” *Liverpool Daily Post*, October 23, 1918, 5.
- ⁵⁰ “Punishment for Guilty. Promised on Proof. Belgium’s Sufferings. Food Stolen by the Enemy,” *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, November 27, 1918, 1.
- ⁵¹ “Scene in Mons,” *Liverpool Echo*, November 12, 1918, 3.
- ⁵² Cecil Roberts, “The Journey Home,” *Liverpool Echo*, December 21, 1918, 3.
- ⁵³ See, for example, Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 219-222 and Schaepdrijver, “Death is Everywhere,” 108-10.
- ⁵⁴ A key document for constructing this image of the Belgians was the Bryce Report. See Viscount Bryce, “Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages” (London, 1915).
- ⁵⁵ Jay M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 65-99; Adrian Gregory, “Britain and Ireland” in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 414-5.
- ⁵⁶ Confidential report by Sir F. Villiers to Mr Balfour about the condition of Brussels after the evacuation of the Germans, December 30, 1918, TNA, FO 608/217/5.
- ⁵⁷ “Belgian Refugees’ Return Home,” *The Scotsman*, January 8, 1919, 7.
- ⁵⁸ “Preston and La Basse: Mayor and Town Clerk’s Visit to War-Stricken Areas,” *Lancashire Daily Post*, March 11, 1920, 3; “Refugees’ Gratitude,” *Lancashire Evening Post*, May 28, 1920, 5.

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- ⁵⁹ “Belgians to Return,” *Sheffield Independent*, January 23, 1919, 3.
- ⁶⁰ Under the terms of the British government’s repatriation scheme, each refugee returning to Belgium by sea was restricted to a 300 pound luggage allowance.
- ⁶¹ “‘Sick of Life’: Belgian Woman’s Suicide at Blackpool,” *Lancashire Evening Post*, December 13, 1919, 5.
- ⁶² “Returned Refugees’ Troubles,” *Yorkshire Evening Post*, May 12, 1919, 5.
- ⁶³ De Man, “Revolution or Evolution,” 604-5.
- ⁶⁴ The British Government were very aware that relations with Belgium had soured in the wake of the Peace Conference. See, for example, British Special Commission to Belgium Report, compiled by Herbert Samuel, July 31, 1919, TNA, WORK 6/362/8.
- ⁶⁵ Henri Jaspar, “Belgium and Western Europe since the Peace Treaty,” *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, 3:4 (1924): 172-3; 189.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.
- ⁶⁷ Loi sur les réparations à accorder aux victimes civiles de la guerre/ Wet op het herstel te verlenen aan de burgerlijke oorlogsslachtoffers (Law on reparations for civilian war victims), 1919. Confirmed in correspondence between author and Gert De Prins of Directorate General War Victims Service, July 2016.
- ⁶⁸ See, for example, “.be 2014-18,” accessed August 18, 2016. <http://www.be14-18.be/en>.
- ⁶⁹ Schaepdrijver, “Death is Everywhere,” 102, 113; Karen D. Shelby, “National Identity in First World War Belgian Military Cemeteries,” *First World War Studies*, 6:3 (2015), 257-8.
- ⁷⁰ Antoon van den Braembussche, “The Silence of Belgium: Taboo and Trauma in Belgian Memory,” *Yale French Studies*, 102 (2002): 38.
- ⁷¹ This figure has been suggested by Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 85.

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